

eyeing the girl in the tree wickedly. Even in the dim light she could plainly see his evil little eyes and working jaws.

"Go away you big brute!" she muttered.

Penny's perch on the limb was a precarious one and her arms began to ache from the strain of holding on. Unsuccessfully, she tried to shift into a more comfortable position.

"I may be treed here for hours!" she thought. "Can I hold on that long?"

The old boar showed no disposition to move off, but kept circling the tree. It seemed to the now desperate Penny, that the animal sensed she was weakening and only awaited the moment when she would tumble down to the ground.

Breaking off a small tree branch she hurled it defiantly at the boar. The act caused her to lose her balance. Frantically, she clawed for a foothold but could not obtain it. Down she slipped to the base of the tree.

The old boar, quick to see his opportunity, charged. With a scream of terror, Penny leaped aside and the animal rushed past, squealing in rage at having missed his prey.

Even now, the boar stood between the girl and the plank walk. The tree from which she had fallen, offered her only refuge, and as she measured her chances,

she realized that the probability of regaining the limb was a slim one.

The boar had turned and was coming for her again.

But at that instant, as Penny froze in terror, a shot was fired from somewhere in the bushes behind her. The bullet went straight and true, stopping the boar in his tracks. He grunted, rolled over, twitched twice, and lay still.

CHAPTER

17

RESCUE

WITH A SOB of relief, Penny whirled around to thank her rescuer. Through the thick leaves of the bushes she could see the shadowy figure of a man. But even as she watched, he retreated.

"Wait!" the girl cried.

There was no answer, and before she could call out a word of thanks for deliverance, the man had vanished.

His disappearance reminded her that though she had been snatched from the jaws of death, the danger by no means was over. At any moment the herd of rooters might return to attack.

Turning, Penny ran swiftly to the planked walk, in her haste not watching where she stepped. Her boots sank deeply in muck. Once on the planks well above the water level, she paused to catch her breath, and to gaze searchingly toward the bushes. All now was still.

"Who could my rescuer have been?" she mused. "Why didn't he wait for me to thank him?"

Penny called several times but received no reply. Finally, giving up, she started slowly back along the walk toward the bay where she had left Louise.

More than the girl realized, the adventure had unnerved her. She felt weak all over, and several times as she gazed steadily at the water, became dizzy and nearly lost her balance.

"Guess I'm not tough enough for swamp life," she reflected. "If ever I get out of here in one piece, I'm tempted to forget Danny Deevers and let the police do all the searching."

Footsteps became audible on the boardwalk some distance away.

Every sense now alert to danger, Penny halted to listen.

Someone was coming toward her, moving swiftly on the creaking planks.

"Penny!" called an agitated voice.

Penny relaxed as she knew that it was her chum. "Louise!" she answered, running to meet her.

Rounding a clump of bushes, and walking gingerly on the narrow boards, Louise stopped short as she beheld her friend.

"Why, you're as white as a ghost!" she exclaimed. "And I distinctly heard you shout! What happened? Did you see a snake?"

"A snake would be mild compared to what I've been through. Were you ever eaten alive?"

"Not that I recall."

"Well, I escaped it by the skin of my teeth," Penny said, rather relishing the adventure now that the story made such good telling. "I was saved by a mysterious stranger!"

Louise gazed at her chum anxiously and reached out to touch her forehead. "You're hot and feverish," she insisted. "This trip has been too much for you."

"I'm as cool as a piece of artificial ice!" Penny retorted. "Furthermore, I'm not touched by the heat!"

"Well, something is wrong with you."

"I've just had the fright of my life, that's all. If you'll give me a chance, I'll tell you what happened."

"The stage is all yours, sweet. But don't give me any tall tale about being rescued by a Prince Charming disguised as a frog!"

Penny's lips compressed into a tight line. "I can see you'll never believe the truth, Lou. So I'll prove it to you! Come with me, and I'll show you the animal that nearly made mince meat of me."

Treading single file, the girls returned the way Penny had come, to the end of the planks.

"Look over at the base of that big tree," Penny instructed, pointing. "What do you see?"

"Nothing."

"The boar that was shot—why, it should be there!"

Penny scarcely could believe the sight of her own eyes. "But it's gone!"

"It's gone because it never was there. Penny, you're suffering from too much heat."

"I'm not! Neither am I imagining things! That old boar was there ten minutes ago. Either he came back to life and went off, or someone dragged him away."

"And your mysterious rescuer?" Louise teased. "What became of him?"

"I wish I knew! Lou, I'm not imagining any of this! Surely you must have heard the shot?"

"Well, I did hear something that sounded like one."

"Also, the lunch is gone. All that remains of it, is the paper lying over there by the tree."

"I do see a newspaper," Louise conceded.

"And that broken tree branch lying on the ground? I was up the tree and threw it at the boar. That's how I lost my balance and fell."

Louise now was convinced the story had solid foundation. "Start from the beginning," she urged.

Penny related what had occurred, rather building up the scene in which she had been delivered from death by the bullet shot from behind a bush.

"Whoever the man is, he must be somewhere close by," Louise said when she had finished. "Perhaps we can find him."

"Not a chance! He's deliberately hiding. Besides,

I know better than to leave the walk again. It's dangerous!"

"In that case we may as well go back and wait for Joe," Louise said.

Treading their way carefully, the girls returned to the far end of the boardwalk. To their surprise, they saw a boat approaching.

"Why, it looks like Joe in the skiff!" Penny commented. "But he isn't due back for a long while yet."

Watching the oncoming boat for a moment, Louise said: "It's Joe all right, and he's coming fast. Something must be wrong."

Soon the guide brought the skiff alongside the sagging boardwalk.

"I heard a shot and started back," he explained. "I sure am glad to see both o' ye safe."

Before Penny could do so, Louise told Joe what had befallen her chum.

"Ye could have been kilt by that old boar," he said soberly. "It was the package o' meat that drew them rooters to the tree. They hain't likely to attack a human lest they're half starved."

"I wish I knew who saved me," Penny said. "Could it have been one of the Hawkins' boys?"

"From the sound, I'd say that shot weren't fired from their rifles. More'n likely it came from my own gun!"

"The stolen one?"

"That's what I'm a-thinkin'. If I could see the bullet that was fired, I could tell fer sure."

"The boar disappeared and the bullet with him," Penny said. "That's another queer thing."

"Whoever kilt the critter may have drug him off, or maybe the animal was only stunned." The guide squinted at the lowering sun. "I'd like powe'ful well to see the place, but it's gitten late. We gotta git back."

"What did you learn at Black Island?" Louise asked as she and Penny climbed into the skiff.

"Never got half way there," the guide said in disgust. "Since I went in last time, the main channel's clogged thick with hyacinths. To find yer way in now's a half day's job."

"Can't we try again tomorrow?" Penny asked eagerly.

The old guide gazed at her quizzically as he dipped his paddle. "Hain't ye had enough o' the swamp after today, young'un?"

"When that old boar came for me, I told myself if ever I got safely away, I'd never come again. But that was only a passing impulse. Black Island interests me."

"It's the most dangerous part of the swamp."

"Because of wild animals, you mean?"

"There's lots wuss things than animals," said the old guide soberly.

"For instance?"

Trapper Joe ignored Penny's question. Becoming as one deaf, he propelled the skiff with powerful strokes.

Penny waited patiently, but the guide showed no inclination to say more about Black Island.

"Shall we make it tomorrow?" she inquired presently.

"Make what?" Joe's wrinkled face was blank.

"Why, I mean, shall we visit Black Island!"

"I hate to disappoint ye, but we hain't a-goin'."

"You may be busy tomorrow. Later in the week perhaps?"

"Not tomorrer nor never. I hain't takin' the responsibility o' bringin' ye young'uns into the swamp agin."

"But why?" wailed Penny. "I wish now I hadn't told you about that old boar!"

"It hain't the boar that's got me worried."

"Then you must be afraid of something on Black Island—something you learned today and are keeping to yourself!"

"Maybe that's it," returned Joe briefly. "Anyhow, we hain't goin'. And it won't do no good to try coxin' me with yer female wiles. My mind's made up!"

Having delivered himself of this ultimatum, the guide plied his paddle steadily.

The set of his jaw warned Penny it would be useless to tease. With a discouraged sigh, she settled down into the bottom of the skiff to think.

## WANTED—A GUIDE

SINCE THE eventful trip to the swamp, several days now had elapsed, and from Penny's viewpoint, nothing of consequence had happened.

Each day the *Riverview Star* carried a story giving details of the police search for Danny Deevers, and on each succeeding morning the account became shorter, with less new information.

Twice, it was rumored police were closing in on the escaped convict, and twice the rumor proved false.

At the request of Salt Sommers and Jerry Livingston, posses made several searches of the outer swamp area. However, no trace of the missing man was found, and investigators quickly switched their activities elsewhere.

Spurred by the *Star's* reward offer, clues, anonymous and otherwise, came to both the newspaper and police officials. All proved worthless.

"It begins to look as if Danny has pulled out of this

territory," Mr. Parker remarked to Penny late one afternoon as she sat in his office at the plant. "At least he's made no further attempt to carry out his threat against Jerry."

"Maybe he's only lying low and waiting until the police search cools off a little."

"Quite possible," the publisher agreed, frowning as he fingered a paperweight. "In that case, Jerry is in real danger. I'll never feel entirely easy in my mind until Deevers is behind bars again."

"Speaking of me, Chief?" inquired a voice from the doorway.

Jerry stood there, a long streamer of pasted copy paper in his hand. He had written a story of a political squabble at city hall, and needed Mr. Parker's approval before handing it over to the typesetters.

The publisher quickly read the article, pencilled an "okay" at the top, and returned it to the reporter.

"Good stuff, Jerry," he approved. "By the way, any news of Danny Deevers?"

"Nothing new."

"Jerry, I can't help feeling he's hiding either in the swamp or somewhere close by," Penny interposed eagerly. "At least something queer is going on out there."

"That's what Salt thinks. We were out there last night."

"In the swamp?" Penny asked, caught by surprise.

"Not in it, but near the Hawkins' place."

"What did you learn, Jerry?"

"Frankly, nothing. You remember that swamp road where you and Salt saw the truck?"

"Yes, of course."

"We watched there for quite awhile around midnight."

"Did you see the truck stop there again?"

"No, but we thought we saw a couple of men at the edge of the swamp—apparently waiting for someone. We tried to sneak up close, but I'm afraid we gave ourselves away. Anyway, they vanished back among the trees."

"Did you notice or hear anything else unusual, Jerry?"

"Well, no. Not unless you'd call pounding on a dishpan out of the ordinary."

"A dishpan!" Penny exclaimed. "Who did it?"

"We couldn't tell. Salt and I heard the sound soon after we had passed the Hawkins' place on our way toward the swamp."

"What sort of sound was it?"

"Just a metallic tap-tap-tap. It may not have been on a dishpan."

"Were the taps in code, Jerry?"

"Couldn't have been a very complicated one for the pounding only lasted a minute or two. It was irregular though."

"Then I'm sure it was a code!" Penny cried. "Louise and I heard the same sound when we were with Trapper Joe in the boat!"

"Did the noise come from outside the swamp?"

"Inside, I'd say."

"Then we may not have heard the same thing. The pounding noise Salt and I noticed, came from the direction of the Hawkins' farm. It may have had no significance."

Before Jerry could say more, Editor DeWitt called him to the copy desk. Mr. Parker turned again to his daughter.

"Penny, if I were you, I'd try to forget Danny Deevers," he advised. "Whatever you do, don't go into the swamp again unless you're with Joe or another guide. Better still, don't go at all."

"Oh, Dad!"

"No good can come of it. Do I have your promise, Penny?"

"But I feel I should try to recover Louise's dog!"

"We'll buy her a new pet."

"It won't be Bones."

"The chance that the dog ever will be found is slim," Mr. Parker said. "In any case, he's not worth the risk of trying to find him. Your promise, Penny?"

"That I won't go in without a guide?" she asked, seizing upon the lesser of two evils. "All right, I promise."

The next day it rained, keeping Penny closely confined at home. However, the following morning gave promise of being sunny and pleasant.

Arising early, she packed a lunch for herself, dressed in hiking clothes with heavy boots, and was ready to leave the house by the time Mrs. Weems came downstairs for breakfast.

"Up so early, Penny?" she inquired.

"Just going on a little trip. Don't expect me back very early."

The housekeeper regarded her severely. "Penny Parker, you're not going to the swamp again!"

"Figured I might."

"Does your father know you're going?"

"We talked it over a day or so ago. He doesn't mind so long as I go with Trapper Joe or another guide."

"In that case I suppose I can't object," Mrs. Weems sighed. "Mind, you don't set foot in the swamp without someone along!"

"I've already given my promise to Dad."

"And do be careful," the housekeeper added. "I'll not feel easy until you're back."

Though neither she nor Penny knew it then, the girl's absence from home was to be a long one, and both were to have many uncomfortable moments before her return.

Reaching the swamp sometime later, Penny parked

the car and walked to Trapper Joe's shack on the creek.

The old guide was sitting on the sagging porch, his feet propped on the railing. Catching sight of Penny he frowned slightly, but as she came up, greeted her in a friendly way.

"'Mawnin'," he said briefly. "What's on yer mind this time?"

"Can't you guess?" Penny asked, sitting down on a step at his feet.

"If yer wantin' me to take you into the swamp agin, yer only wastin' yer words. I hain't got the time."

"I'll pay you well."

"It hain't the money."

"Then why do you refuse to take me in?"

"Tole ye, didn't I? I got work to do."

Penny knew that Joe was only making excuses, for obviously, one day was very like another in his care-free life.

"What work do you have this morning that can't wait, Joe?"

"Well, fer one thing I gotta smoke out a swarm o' bees and git me a nice mess o' honey fer winter. Want to go with me?"

"Into the swamp?"

"No, this tree hain't in the swamp."

"Then I don't want to go. Joe, I think you're stubborn! You know how much this trip means to me."



"Reckon I do."

"Then why not take me? Tell me your reason for refusing."

Old Joe gazed steadily at Penny and for a moment seemed on the verge of making interesting revelations. But to her disappointment, he shook his head.

"Jest don't wanter go, that's all."

"You learned something the other day when we were in the swamp!" Penny accused. "You're keeping it from me—probably to protect someone! Isn't that it?"

"Hain't saying."

"You know Danny Deevers is hidden somewhere in the swamp! You're helping to protect him!"

Old Joe's feet came down from the railing with a thump. "Now that hain't so!" he denied. "I got no time fer the likes o' Danny Deevers. If I knowed where he is, I'd give him up to the law."

"Well, someone is hiding there! I heard Ezekiel Hawkins talking on Lookout Point, didn't I? We found the dead campfire. Your gun was stolen, and later a mysterious person rescued me when I was treed by the boar."

"Could have been one o' the Hawkins'."

"You don't honestly believe that, Joe."

"No, reckon I don't," the guide sighed. "You sure kin shoot questions at a feller faster'n these new Army rockets I hear tell about. I'd like to tell ye what ye

want to know, but there's things best not talked about. Knowin' too much kin be dangerous."

Penny scarcely could hide her annoyance, for several times now the guide had made similar hints.

"I don't trust the Hawkins' family at all," she announced. "If they're not involved with Danny Deevers, they're up to something here in the swamp. Otherwise, why would they be so mean?"

"The Hawkins' family always has been mean an' ornery."

"Another thing—" Penny started to mention how she and Salt had seen large containers of some unknown product being removed from the swamp, but broke off as she decided to keep the information to herself."

"Yeah?" inquired the guide.

"Nothing," replied Penny. "If you won't take me into the swamp, is there anyone else who will?"

"Couldn't say fer sure," Joe replied, "but I reckon I'm the only guide hereabouts fer maybe fifty miles."

"Won't you reconsider?"

"You put up a powe'ful strong argument, young'un, but I gotta say no fer yer own good."

"You've certainly ruined all my plans," Penny said crossly. "Well, since you won't help me, I'll say goodbye."

Back in the car once more, she could not bring herself to return home so early in the morning. Debating

a moment, she drove to the homestead of the Widow Jones.

Dressed in a bright calico dress, the woman sat under a shade tree skillfully cutting up the meat of a turtle and dropping it into a pan of cold water.

As Penny walked across the weed-choked yard, she looked up in a startled way, but smiled as she recognized the girl.

"I'm fixin' to have me a nice soup," she explained. "Ye cook the turtle with diced carrots, potatoes, okra, and tomatoes and serve it piping hot. Ever et any?"

"No, I never have," Penny replied, watching the preparations with interest. "It sounds good."

"Ye kin stay and have dinner with me," the woman invited. "I'll fix some flour biscuits and we'll have a right nice meal."

"I'm afraid I'll have to get back home," Penny said regretfully. "My trip here today was a failure."

Because the Widow Jones gave her an inquiring look of sympathy, she explained that Trapper Joe had refused to take her into the swamp. She went on to tell why the trip meant so much to her, and of her belief that a clever investigator who knew the area might find clues which would lead to the capture of Danny Deevers.

"So Joe wouldn't take ye?" the Widow Jones inquired softly. "Why?"

"He says it's dangerous."

"And since when has Joe got so a-feared of his shadow?"

"It did sound like an excuse to me. I think he knows what is going on in the swamp, and wants no part of it."

"Ye say it means a lot to ye to make the trip?"

"Oh, yes, I'd do it in a minute, if I could find anyone who knows the channels. But Joe says he's the only guide for fifty miles around."

Mrs. Jones slapped the last piece of turtle meat into the water with a splash. She arose, gathering her long skirts about her.

"Joe's maybe fergettin' that as a gal, my paw taught me every crook and turn of the swamp. Hain't been in there fer quite a spell now, but I got a hankerin' to go agin."

Penny stared at her incredulously.

"You mean you'll take me?" she demanded. "To-day? Now?"

"I've got a quilt I should be piecin' on this afternoon, but hit can wait. If you hain't afeared to place yerself in my hands, I'll take you."

"I'll jump at the chance! But do you have a boat?"

"We'll make Joe lend us his!" the widow said grimly. "And if he tries squirmin', well, I know how to handle him!"

## PENNY'S PLAN

MAKING ELABORATE preparations for the trip into the swamp, Mrs. Jones packed a lunch, and donned a huge straw hat and stout boots.

However, she did not change the long, flowing skirt, which flopped about her ankles as she and Penny walked through the meadow to Trapper Joe's dock.

From the porch, the old guide saw the pair and watched them warily.

"We're takin' yer boat, Joe," the widow called to him from the creek's edge. "We're makin' a little trip into the swamp."

Joe pulled himself from the chair and came quickly to the dock.

"Hold on now!" he protested. "Two wimmin can't go alone into the swamp! Leastwise, not beyond Lookout Point."

"Says who?" retorted the widow, already untying the boat.

"That young 'un's talked you into goin' to Black Island! Ye can't do it. You'll git lost in one o' the false channels. The hyacinths are bad this year."

The widow hesitated, then tossed her head as she dropped the package of lunch into the skiff.

"Ye forgit I was swamp raised! Git me the paddles and a pole, Joe. Don't stand there gawkin'."

"No wimmin ever went as far as Black Island. It hain't safe!"

"My Paw took me there when I was a little girl. I hain't forgittin' the way."

"Ye'r stubborn as a mule!" Joe accused, glaring at her. "If you're dead set on goin', I see I'll have to give in and go with ye. But it's agin my best judgment."

"No one asked ye to go with us, Joe," the widow said tartly. "We aim to make this trip by ourselves. Jest git the paddles and pole."

Joe threw up his hands in a gesture of defeat and started slowly for the shack. "Wimmin!" he muttered. "There jest hain't no sense in 'em!"

He took his time inside the shack, but finally returned with the requested paddles and pole.

"There ye are!" he snapped. "But I'm warnin' ye, if ye git into trouble or lost, don't expect me to come after ye."

"Now I'll take the kicker motor," the widow ordered, paying no heed to his words.

"Not my motor!" Joe exclaimed defiantly. "I paid sixty dollars fer it secondhand and I hain't lettin' no female ruin it."

"Ye can't expect me to blister my hands rowin' all day," the widow replied. "We aim to make a quick trip."

"Ye can't use the motor in all them hyacinths!"

"Maybe not, but it'll take us through the open spots a heap faster. The motor, Joe."

Grumbling loudly, the guide went to the house once more. He came back with the motor which he attached and started for the widow.

"Thank ye kindly, Joe," she grinned at him as the boat pulled away from the dock. "I'll make ye one of my apple pies when I git back."

"If ye get back," the guide corrected morosely.

Propelled by the motor, the skiff sped steadily through the channel and came presently to the Hawkins' farm. The popping of the engine, which could be heard some distance, drew Mrs. Hawkins to the dock.

She signaled the boat as it drew near.

"Howdy," the Widow Jones greeted her politely though with no warmth. She throttled down the engine and drifted in toward shore.

"Goin in fer a little fishin', I take it," Mrs. Hawkins observed by way of inquiry. "But where's yer fishin' poles?"

"Left 'em ter home," the widow replied.

"Then you hain't fishin'."

"'Pears like yer right smart at usein' yer eyes," the widow agreed dryly.

A slight frown which did not escape Penny, puckered the farm woman's forehead. She seemed on the verge of speaking, then appeared to change her mind. As the boat drifted on, she watched stolidly.

"Never did like that woman," Mrs. Jones commented when the skiff had rounded a bend. "She's got sharp eyes, and she don't approve 'cause we're goin inter the swamp together."

"Why should she care?" Penny asked.

"I wonder myself."

"I've noticed that she always seems to be watching the entrance channel into the swamp," Penny said thoughtfully. "Perhaps she is the one who taps out those signals!"

"Signals? What do you mean, young'un?"

Penny told of the strange pounding noises she had heard during her previous trip through the swamp.

"I could almost wager Mrs. Hawkins will wait until we're a safe distance away, and then signal!" the girl went on. "Don't I wish I could catch her though!"

"Maybe ye kin. We could shut off the motor and drift back and watch."

Penny's eyes began to sparkle with excitement. "I'd love to do it. But won't she be listening for the sound of our motor as we go deeper into the swamp? If

she doesn't hear it, she's apt to suspect something."

"Ye've got a real head on yer shoulders," said the widow approvingly. "By the way, I don't like to keep callin' ye young'un now we're good friends. What's yer name?"

"I thought you knew. I'm sorry. It's Penny Parker."

"Penny! I never did hear o' a girl named after money."

"I wasn't exactly," Penny smiled. "My real name is Penelope, but no one ever liked it. So I'm called Penny."

"Penelope, hain't sich a bad name. That's what I'll call ye."

"About Mrs. Hawkins—" the girl reminded her.

"Oh, yes, now if ye was a mind to find out about her, it wouldn't be so hard."

"How?"

"We hain't gone fur into the swamp yet. I could let ye out here on the bank and ye could slip back afoot to the bend in the channel."

"Where I'd be able to watch the house!"

"Ye got the idea, Penelope. All the while, I would keep goin' on in the boat until the sound o' the motor jest naturally died out. Then I could row back here and pick ye up agin."

"Mrs. Jones, you're the one who has a head on your shoulders!" Penny cried. "Let's do it!"

The widow brought the skiff alongside the bank, steadying it as the girl stepped ashore.

"Ye got a watch?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then I'll meet ye right here in 'bout three-quarters of an hour. I kin keep track o' the time by lookin' at the sun."

"That may not give me enough time," Penny said anxiously.

"If yer late, I'll wait fer ye," the widow promised. "But try to be here. If ye hain't we may havter give up the trip, 'cause it hain't sensible startin' in late in the day."

"I'll be here," Penny assured her. "If nothing happens in three-quarters of an hour, I'll just give it up."

The boat, its motor popping steadily, slipped away. Penny scrambled up the muddy bank, and finding a well-trod path, walked rapidly toward the Hawkins' place.

Soon she came to the bend in the creek, and there paused. From afar, she could hear the retreating sound of the skiff's motor.

Through a break in the bushes, the girl peered toward the distant farmhouse. To her disappointment, the yard was now deserted, and Mrs. Hawkins was nowhere in sight.

"Maybe I was wrong," Penny thought. "I'd hate to waste all this valuable time."

For a half hour she waited. Twice Mrs. Hawkins came out of the house, once to gather in clothes from the line and the second time to obtain a pail of water.

"I guess my hunch was crazy," Penny told herself. "I'll have to be starting back to meet Mrs. Jones."

The sound of the motorboat now had died out completely, so the girl knew the widow already was on her way to their appointed meeting place.

Turning away from the bushes, Penny paused for one last glance at the farmhouse. The yard remained deserted. But as she sighed in disappointment, the kitchen door again flew open.

Mrs. Hawkins came outside and walked rapidly to the shed. She listened attentively for a moment. Then from a peg on the outside wall, she took down a big tin dishpan and a huge wooden mixing spoon.

Penny watched with mounting excitement. This was the moment for which she had waited!

Carefully, the farm woman looked about to be certain no one was nearby. Then with firm precision, she beat out a tattoo on the dishpan.

"It's a signal to someone in the swamp!" guessed Penny. "In code she is tapping out that Mrs. Jones and I are on our way into the interior!"

## CHAPTER

## 20

*TRAILING HOD HAWKINS*

AFTER MRS. HAWKINS had pounded out the signal, she hung the dishpan on its peg once more, and went to the door of the shed. Without opening it, she spoke to someone inside the building. Penny was too far away to hear what she said.

In a minute, the woman turned away and vanished into the house.

Penny waited a little while to be certain Mrs. Hawkins did not intend to come outside again. Then, with an uneasy glance at her wrist watch, she stole away to rejoin Mrs. Jones.

The skiff was drawn up to shore by the time she reached the appointed meeting place.

"I was jest about to give you up," the widow remarked as the girl scrambled into the boat. "Did ye learn what ye wanted to know?"

Penny told her what she had seen.

"'Pears you may be right about it bein a signal,"

the widow agreed thoughtfully. "We may be able to learn more too, 'cause whoever had his'n ears tuned to Ma Hawkins' signal may figure we're deep in the swamp by this time."

"Let's keep on the alert as we near Lookout Point," Penny urged.

Mrs. Jones nodded and silently dipped the paddle.

Soon they came within view of the point. Passing beneath an overhanging tree branch, the widow grasped it with one hand, causing the skiff to swing sideways into a shelter of leaves.

"See anyone, Penelope?" she whispered.

"Not a soul."

"Then maybe we was wrong about Ma Hawkins signalling anyone."

"But I do see a boat beached on the point!" Penny added. "And see! Someone is coming out of the bush now!"

"Hod Hawkins!"

Keeping quiet, the pair in the skiff waited to see what would happen.

Hod came down to the water's edge, peering with a puzzled expression along the waterway. He did not see the skiff, shielded by leaves and dense shade.

"Hit's all-fired queer," they heard him mutter. "I shore didn't see no boat pass here this mawnin'. But Maw musta seen one go by or she wouldn't heve pounded the pan."

Hod sat down on a log, watching the channel. Penny and Mrs. Jones remained where they were. Once the current, sluggish as it was, swung the skiff against a projecting tree root. The resulting jar and scraping sound seemed very loud to their ears. But the Hawkins youth did not hear.

Penny and the widow were becoming weary of sitting in such cramped positions under the tree branch. To their relief, Hod arose after a few minutes. Reaching into the hollow log, he removed a tin pan somewhat smaller than the dishpan Mrs. Hawkins had used a few minutes earlier.

"He's going to signal!" Penny whispered excitedly. "Either to his mother, or someone deeper in the swamp!"

Already Hod was beating out a pattern on the pan, very similar to the one the girl had heard before.

After a few minutes, the swamper thrust the pan back into its hiding place. He hesitated, and then to the surprise of Penny and Mrs. Jones, stepped into his boat.

"If he comes this way, he's certain to see us!" Penny thought uneasily.

With never a glance toward the leafy hideout, Hod shoved off, rowing deeper into the swamp.

"Dare we follow him?" whispered Penny.

"That's what I aim to do," the Widow Jones rejoined grimly. "I hain't afeared o' the likes o' Hod

Hawkins! Moreover, fer a long time, I been calculatin' to find out what takes him and Coon so offen into the swamp."

"You mean recently don't you, Mrs. Jones. Just since Danny Deevers escaped from prison?"

"I don't know nothin' about Danny Deevers," the widow replied as she picked up the paddle again. "I do know that the Hawkins' been up to mischief fer more'n a year."

"Then you must have an idea what that city truck was doing on the swamp road the other night."

"An idear—yes," agreed Mrs. Jones. "But I hain't sure, and until I am, I hain't makin' no accusations."

Now that Hod's boat was well away, the widow noiselessly sent the skiff forward.

"We kin follow close enough to jest about keep him in sight if we don't make no noise," she warned. "But we gotta be keerful."

Penny nodded and became silent.

Soon the channel was no more than a path through high water-grass and floating hyacinths. Hod propelled his boat with powerful muscles, alternating with forked pole and paddle. At times, when Penny took over to give the Widow Jones a "breather," she was hard pressed not to lose the trail.

"We're headin' straight fer Black Island, hit 'pears to me," Mrs. Jones whispered once. "The channel don't look the same though as when I was through

here last. But I reckon if we git lost we kin find our way out somehow."

Soon the skiff was inching through a labyrinth of floating hyacinths; there were few stretches of open water. Shallow channels to confuse the unwary, radiated out in a dozen directions, many of them with no outlets.

Always, however, before the hyacinths closed in, the Widow Jones was able to pick up the path through which Hod had passed.

"From the way he's racin' along, he's been this way plenty o' times," she remarked. "We're headin' fer Black Island right enough."

The sun now was high overhead, beating down on Penny's back and shoulders with uncomfortable warmth. Mrs. Jones brought out the lunch and a jug of water. One ate while the other rowed.

"We're most to Black Island," the widow informed presently. "If ye look sharp through the grass, ye can see thet point o' high land. Thet's the beginnin' o' the island—biggest one in the swamp."

"But where is Hod?"

"He musta pulled up somewheres in the bushes. We'll have to be keerful and go slow now or we'll be caught."

"Listen!" whispered Penny.

Although she could as yet see no one on the island, voices floated out across the water.



"We heerd yer signal, Hod," a man said, "but we hain't seen no one."

"A boat musta come through, or Maw wouldn't heve beat the pan."

"Whoever 'twas, they probably went off somewheres else," the other man replied. "Glad yer here anyhow, Hod. We got a lot o' work to do and ye can help us."

Hod's reply was inaudible, for obviously the men were moving away into the interior of the island.

"Thet was old Ezekiel talkin' to his son," the Widow Jones declared, although Penny already had guessed as much. "They've gone off somewheres, so if we're a mind to land, now's our only chance."

Penny gazed at her companion in surprise and admiration.

"You're not afraid?" she inquired softly.

"Maybe I am," the Widow Jones admitted. "But that hain't no excuse fer me turnin' tail! This here's a free country ain't it?"

She poled the skiff around the point to a thick clump of bushes. There she pulled up, and with Penny's help made the skiff secure to a tree root hidden from sight by overhanging branches.

Scrambling up the muddy bank, the pair paused to take bearings. Voices now had died away and to all appearances the island might have been deserted.

Treading with utmost caution, Penny and the

Widow Jones tramped along the shore until they came to a path. Abruptly, the girl halted, sniffing the air.

"I smell wood burning," she whispered. "From a campfire probably."

"An I smell somethin' more," added the Widow Jones grimly. "Cain't ye notice thet sickish, sweet odor in the air?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"We'll find out," replied Mrs. Jones. "But if we git cotched, I'm warnin' ye we won't never git away from here. Ye sure ye want to go on?"

"Very sure."

"Then come on. And be keerful not to crackle any leaves underfoot."

The path led to a low, tunnelliike opening in the thicket. Penny, who again had taken the lead, crouched low, intending to crawl through.

Before she could do so, she heard a stifled cry behind her. Turning, she saw that Mrs. Jones had sagged to one knee, and her face was twisted with pain.

Penny ran to her. "You're hurt!" she whispered. "Bitten by a snake?"

Mrs. Jones shook her head, biting her lip to keep back the tears. She pointed to her ankle, caught beneath a tree root.

"I stumbled and wrenched it 'most off," she murmured. "Hit's a bad sprain and I'm afeared I can't go on."

*THE TUNNEL OF LEAVES*

PENNY RAISED the woman to her feet, but as Mrs. Jones tried to take a step, she saw that the sprain indeed was a bad one.

Already the ankle was swelling and skin had been broken. At each attempted step, the widow winced with pain, suffering intensely.

"If I kin only git back to the boat, I'll be all right," she said, observing Penny's worried expression. "Drat it all! Jest when I wanted to find out what the Hawkins' are doin' on this island!"

Supporting much of the widow's weight on her shoulders, Penny helped her back to the skiff.

"I guess we may as well start back," she said, unable to hide her bitter disappointment.

The widow reached for an oar, then looked keenly at Penny and put it back again.

"'Course it would be a risky thing fer ye to go on by yerself while I wait here in the boat—"

Penny's slumped shoulders straightened. Her blue eyes began to dance.

"You mean you don't mind waiting here while I see where that tunnel of leaves leads?" she demanded.

"'Pears like we've come too fur not to find out what's goin' on. Think ye can git in there and back without being cotched?"

"I'm sure of it!"

The widow sighed. "I hain't sure of it, but you got more gumpshun than any other young'un I ever met. Go on if ye'r a-goin', and if anyone sees ye, light out fer the boat. I'll be ready to shove off."

"Mrs. Jones, you're a darling!" Penny whispered, giving the gnarled hand a quick pressure. "I'll make it all right!"

Moving directly to the thicket, she dropped on all fours and started through the leafy tunnel where Hod had disappeared. The sweetish odor now was much plainer than before.

She had crawled only a few feet, when a hand reached out of nowhere and grasped her shoulder.

Penny whirled around, expecting to see a member of the Hawkins' family. For a moment she saw no one, and then from the thicket beside the tunnel, a figure became visible. The hold on her shoulder relaxed.

"Who are you?" she demanded in a whisper.

"Friend."

"Then show yourself!"

The leaves rustled, and a dark-haired lad with tangled curls crawled into the tunnel beside her. His shoes were ripped, his clothing dirty and in tatters. A rifle was grasped in his hand.

"Bada men," he warned, jerking his head in the direction Penny had been crawling. "Mucha better go back boat."

"Who are you and why do you warn me?" Penny asked, deeply puzzled.

The boy did not reply.

Light dawned suddenly upon Penny. "You're the one who saved me from the boar!"

The boy's quick grin was acknowledgment he had fired the shot.

"But why did you run away?" Penny asked. "Why didn't you wait and let me thank you for saving my life?"

"You giva me to police maybe," replied the boy in broken English. "I staya here—starva first!"

"Who are you?"

"Name no matter."

Penny's mind had been working swiftly. She was convinced the boy who had saved her also was the one who had stolen Trapper Joe's gun. Evidently, he had needed it to survive in the swamp. He was thin and his eyes had a hungry look, she noted.

"How did you get to this island?" she inquired. "Do you have a boat?"

"Make-a raft." The boy's eyes darted down the leafy tunnel. "No good here," he said, seizing Penny's arm and pulling her back into the thicket. "Someone-a come!"

Scarcely had the pair flattened themselves on the ground than Ezekiel Hawkins crawled out through the tunnel, pushing his gun ahead of him. Standing upright not three feet from Penny and her companion, he gazed sharply about.

"Thought I heerd voices," he muttered.

Penny held her breath, knowing that if the swamper should walk down the shore even a dozen yards, he would see the Widow Jones waiting in the skiff.

To her great relief, Ezekiel moved in the opposite direction. After satisfying himself that no boat approached the island, he returned through the tunnel and disappeared.

"What's going on back in there?" Penny whispered as soon as it was safe to ask.

"Bada men," her companion said briefly.

"You're driving me to distraction!" Penny muttered, losing patience. "Do those swampers know you're here on the island?"

The boy shook his tangled curls, grinning broadly. "Chasa me once. No catch."

"You're Italian, aren't you?" Penny asked suddenly.

A guarded look came over the lad's sun-tanned face. His brown eyes lost some of their friendliness.

"Now I have it!" Penny exclaimed before he could speak. "You're Antonio Tienta, wanted by Immigration authorities for slipping into this country illegally!"

The boy did not deny the accusation, and the half-frightened, defiant look he gave her, confirmed that she had struck upon the truth.

"I no go back!" he muttered. "I starva first!"

"Don't become so excited, or those men will hear you and we'll both be caught," Penny warned. "Tell me about yourself, Tony. I already know a little."

"How mucha you know?" he asked cautiously.

"That you acted as a guide to G.I.'s in Italy and stowed aboard a troopship coming to this country. Even now, I guess authorities aren't certain how you slipped past New York officials."

"No trouble," boasted the lad. "On ship my friendsa the G.I.'s they feeda me. We dock New York; I hide under bunk; all G.I.'s leava boat. Boat go to other dock. Sailor friend giva me clothes. Sailors leave-a boat. I slippa out. No one geta wise."

"Then where did you go?"

"Stay in-a New York only two—three days. Go hitchhike into country. Work-a on farm. No like it. Hear Immigration men-a come, so I go. Come-a one day to swamp. Good place; I stay."

"You've not had an easy time keeping alive in this dismal place," Penny said sympathetically. "Isn't that Trapper Joe's gun?"

"Steal-a one night," the boy agreed. "Give back some-a time."

Penny studied the youth with growing concern. "Tony," she said, "you can't hope to stay here long. The only sensible thing is to give yourself up."

"No! I die first! American best country in all-a the world! No one ever take-a me back!"

"But you can't expect to elude Immigration officials very long. If you give yourself up, they might be lenient with you."

"They send-a me back," Tony said stubbornly. "I stay right-a here!"

"To starve? You're hungry now, aren't you?"

"Sure. But in Italy I hungry many times-a too."

"Tony, we'll talk about this later," Penny sighed. "Right now, I want to learn what's going on here at the island. Know anything about it?"

"Sure," the boy grinned. "Know plenty."

"Then suppose you tell me, Tony."

"I show-a you," the boy offered.

Avoiding the leafy tunnel, he led Penny in a half circle through another section of dense thicket.

Soon he motioned for her to drop on her knees.

The sickish odor rising through the trees now was very disagreeable again.

A few yards farther on, Tony halted. Still lying flat on his stomach, he carefully pulled aside the bushes so that his companion might see.

*HELP FROM TONY*

THROUGH THE leaves, Penny saw a fairly large clearing. Three men, Ezekiel Hawkins and his two sons, were squatted about a big hardwood fire over which was a large copper cooker.

A pipe extended above the cover, connected with a series of coils immersed in a barrel of cold water.

"A still!" the girl whispered. "They're making alcohol here and selling it in the city! That's what those containers held that were trucked away!"

"Make-a the stuff every day," volunteered Tony. "I watch—sometimes I steal-a the lunch. They very mad but no catch."

"They're probably afraid you'll tell revenue officers," Penny whispered.

From one of the barrels, Coon had taken a dipper filled with the pale fluid. As he drank deeply from it, his father said sharply:

"Thet's enough, Coon! We gotta git this stuff made

an moved out o' here tonight, and ye won't be fitten."

"What's yer rush, Pappy? We got termorrer, hain't we?" Coon sat down, and bracing his back against a tree trunk, yawned drowsily.

"Ye want to be caught by them lousy revenooers?"

"There hain't no danger. Hain't we got a fool-proof system? If anyone starts this way, Maw'll spot 'em and give us the signal."

"Folkses is gittin' wise, and we hain't none too popular hereabouts. We're moving this stuff out tonight."

"Jest as you say, Pappy." Coon stirred reluctantly.

"An we hain't operatin' the still no more till things quiets down. I don't like it that gal snoopin around here, claimin' to be lookin' fer her dawg."

"Ye should have kilt the dawg, stead o' keepin' him," Hod spoke up as he dumped a sack of mash into a tub. "Tole ye it would make us trouble."

"Yer always tellin me!" Ezekiel retorted. "Thet dog's handy to heve here, an I never was one to kill a helpless animal without cause. Now git to yer work, and let me do the thinkin' fer this outfit!"

Penny's curiosity now had been fully satisfied as to the illegal business in which the Hawkins' family had engaged, but she also felt a little disappointed.

She had hoped the men would speak of Danny Deever, perhaps revealing his hideout. The convict was nowhere to be seen, and there was no evidence he ever had been on Black Island.

Not wishing to leave Mrs. Jones too long alone in the boat, Penny presently motioned to Tony that she had seen and heard enough.

Inch by inch, they crept backwards away from the tiny clearing.

Then suddenly Penny stopped, for Ezekiel was speaking again:

"We gotta do something about Danny and git him off our hands."

Penny instantly became all ears, listening intently to Coon's reply:

"Now ye'r talkin', Pappy. Takin' him in was a big mistake. Hit's apt ter land us in jail if them city officers come snoopin' around here agin."

"There wouldn't have been no risk, if Hod and Danny hadn't taken the widder's car and drive into town. Didn't ye have no sense, Hod?"

"Danny wanted to go," Hod whined. "How was we ter know another car was goin' to smash into us? Thet fool newspaper camera man an' the girl had to be there!"

"That wasn't the wust," Ezekiel went on as he fed the fire with chips. "Then ye follered 'em to the theater!"

"Danny said we had ter git the picture or they'd print it in the newspaper."

"But did ye git the picture?"

"No," Hod growled.

"Instead o' that, ye let Danny git into a fight."

"'Twasn't no fight and nobody knew it was him. He seen an enemy o' hisn go into the building. I tried ter talk him out o' it, but he wouldn't listen. He crawled in through a window, and slugged the feller."

"He did have sense enough to git rid o' the car, but ye shouldn't have left it so close to our place," Ezekiel pointed out. "That newspaper gal's been out here twict now, and she's catchin' on!"

"She's only a gal," Hod said carelessly. "Ye do too much worryin', Pappy."

"I do the thinkin' fer this family. An' I say things is gittin' too hot fer comfort. We gotta git rid o' Danny tonight."

"How ye aimin' ter do it, Pappy?" inquired Coon. "Be ye fergittin' he's got \$50,000 hid away somewheres an' he hain't give us our slice yet?"

"Fer all his promises, maybe he don't calculate ever to give us our cut! Ever think o' that?"

"Danny would double cross us if he got the chanst," Hod agreed. "Maybe ye'r right, Pappy!"

"Doggone tootin', I am! We git rid o' him tonight, soon's we git back from this island. But first we make him tell where he hid the money!"

"How we gonna do it, Pappy?" asked Coon.

"Hain't figured fer sure, but he's the same as our

prisoner, ain't he? If we was to turn him over to the police, claimin' we found him hidin' out in the swamp, he couldn't prove no different."

"And we'd git \$10,000 reward!" Hod added. "We could use thet money!"

"I hain't one to double cross a pal if it can be helped," Ezekiel amended hastily. "Now if Danny's a mind to tell where he hid the money, and split, we'll help him git out o' here tonight."

"And if he won't cough up?"

"We'll turn him over to police and claim the reward."

To Penny, it now was clear Hod Hawkins had been with Danny Deevers at the time Jerry was slugged. Also, the conversation made it evident the escaped convict had sought a hideout somewhere near if not in the swamp.

Tensely, the girl waited for further details of the escape plan, but none were forthcoming. The three men applied themselves to their work and said no more.

"My best bet is to get away from here fast and notify police!" Penny thought.

Noiselessly, she and Tony retreated through the thicket to a shoreline some distance away.

"Listen, Tony!" Penny said hurriedly. "I've got to go away for awhile! Will you stay here and keep watch of these men for me?"

"I stay," the boy promised soberly.

"I'll come back as soon as I can. And Tony! Please don't run away. I want to do something for you—perhaps I can."

"No go back to Italy," the boy said firmly. "Stay-a here—you come back. Then go far away. No trust pol-cese."

Penny dared not take time to try to convince the youth of the folly of fleeing from Immigration authorities. Saying goodbye, she ran to the boat where the Widow Jones anxiously awaited her.

"Shove off!" she ordered tersely. "I've seen plenty! I'll tell you about it, once we're away from here!"

Mrs. Jones gave a mighty push with her pole, and the skiff floated out of its hiding place into the hyacinth-clogged channel.

"How is your foot?" Penny inquired. "Better let me paddle."

"It hain't hurtin' so much now," the widow replied without giving up the paddle. "I'll steer until we're out o' these floatin' hyacinth beds."

"One place looks exactly like another to me," Penny said anxiously. "So many false channels!"

"Ye git a feel fer it after awhile. There's a current to follow, but it's mighty faint."

"We must get back as fast as we can," Penny urged, glancing nervously over her shoulder toward Black Is-

land. In terse sentences she told of her meeting with Tony and all they had seen in the clearing.

"So the Hawkins' are runnin' a still!" commented the widow. "Humph! Jest as I figured, only I didn't dast say so without proof."

"The important thing is they're hiding Danny Deever! Where they're keeping him will be for the police to discover as soon as they arrest Ezekiel and his sons."

"I'll git ye back fast," the widow promised grimly. "Soon's we git out o' these beds and away from the island, I kin switch on the motor."

Safely out of sight of the island, the couple found themselves in a labyrinth of floating hyacinths with no clearly defined channel. The Widow Jones tried a half dozen of them, each time being forced to return to a point she could identify as their starting place.

"Penelope, I can't seem to find the main channel," she confessed at last. "'Pears like we're lost."

"Oh, we can't be!" Penny exclaimed. "We must get back quickly!"

"I'm a-tryin' hard as I kin," the widow said doggedly.

"Let me paddle for awhile," Penny offered. "Your ankle is hurting and you're tired. Just tell me which way to go."

Mrs. Jones indicated a channel which opened in a wide sweep. But before Penny had paddled far, it

played out. The sun, sinking lower in the sky, warned the pair how fast time was passing.

For another hour they sought desperately to find the exit channel. Although they took turns at paddling, and used the motor whenever the passageway was not too clogged, they soon became exhausted.

"It hain't no use," the widow said at last. "We're tuckered out, and we're goin' around in circles. We'll pull up on shore and take a little rest."

Penny nodded miserably.

Hérons flew lazily over as the couple pulled the boat out on the soft muck. Seeking a high point of land, the widow flung herself flat on her back to rest.

For a time, Penny sat beside her, thinking over everything that had occurred. It was bitterly disappointing to realize that due purely to a stroke of bad luck, Danny Deever undoubtedly would elude police.

"Mrs. Jones and I may not find our way out of here in twenty-four hours!" she thought. "By that time, the Hawkins' family will have helped him escape!"

Tormented by weariness, Penny stretched out beside the widow. Insects annoyed her for awhile. Then she dozed off.

Much later when the girl awoke, she saw that her companion still slept. The shadow of dusk already was heavy upon the swamp.

Sitting up, Penny gazed resentfully across the water at an almost solid sea of floating plants.



"Such miserable luck!" she muttered. "Of all times to be lost!"

Penny's gaze remained absently upon the hyacinth bed. The plants slowly were drifting westward. At first their movement signified nothing to the girl. Then suddenly, she sprang to her feet.

Excitedly she shook Mrs. Jones by the arm. "The channel!" she cried. "I can see it now! If we move fast, we still may get out of the swamp before night!"

## CHAPTER

## 23

*LOST IN THE HYACINTHS*

MRS. JONES shaded her eyes from the slanting rays of the low-hung sun to gaze for a long moment at the almost motionless hyacinth bed blanketing the water.

"Right ye are, Penelope!" she exclaimed jubilantly. "The channel's plain to see now! Help me git to the boat, and we'll be out o' this tangle."

Once in the skiff, the widow again seized the paddle.

"We gotta inch our way along fer a little," she explained. "If we don't foller the drift o' the bed, we'll be lost agin and that hain't smart."

Steadily the widow shoved the little boat through the water plants, seldom hesitating in choice of the channel.

"I got the feel o' it agin!" she declared happily. "We'll be out o' this in no time!"

However, dark shadows were deepening to blackness when the boat finally came into water open enough to permit use of the motor. Propelled by the

engine, the skiff presently approached Lookout Point.

"Let's paddle from here," proposed Penny. "Ezekiel and his sons may be out of the swamp by this time. We don't want them to see us or guess where we've been."

Mrs. Jones shut off the motor and with a tired sigh, offered the paddle to Penny. The channel now was plainly marked and easy to follow, even in semi-darkness. Whenever the girl hesitated, the widow told her which way to steer.

"We're out of it now," Mrs. Jones said as lights of the Hawkins' farmhouse twinkled through the trees. "Reckon Trapper Joe's fit to be tied, we been gone so long!"

Penny allowed the skiff to drift with the current. As it floated past the Hawkins' dock, loud voices came from the direction of the woodshed.

"Sounds like an argument goin' on," observed the widow.

Penny brought the skiff in and made fast to the dock.

"What ye aimin' to do?" the widow inquired in surprise.

"Wait here!" Penny whispered. "I have a hunch what's going on and I must find out!" Before Mrs. Jones could protest, she slipped away into the darkness.

Stealthily the girl approached the woodshed. A

voice which she recognized as Ezekiel's, now plainly could be heard.

"Danny, we've fed ye and kept ye here fer days in this woodshed, and it hain't safe!" the speaker said. "Ye gotta git out tonight—now—through the swamp. The river'll take ye out the other end, and ye maybe kin git out o' the state."

"And maybe I'll be caught!" the other voice replied. Penny knew it was Danny Deevers who spoke. "I'm staying right here!"

"Coon and Hod'll guide ye through the swamp, so ye'll be safe enough till ye git to the other side," Ezekiel argued. "We hain't keepin' ye here another day. You got clothes and food and a good chanst to git away."

Penny crept close to the wall of the woodshed. Peering through a small, dirty window on the far side she saw four men seated on kegs in a room dimly lighted by a lantern.

The man facing her plainly was Danny Deevers. Opposite him were Ezekiel and his two sons, both armed with rifles.

"Hain't no use talkin' any more," Ezekiel said flatly. "Ye'r leavin' here tonight, Danny. Maw's fixin' ye a lunch to take."

"Paw, hain't you forgittin' something?" Coon prodded his father.

"Hain't fergittin' nothin', Coon. Danny, 'fore you

go, there's a matter o' money to be settled between us. Ye got \$50,000 hid somewheres close, and we want our cut fer hidin' ye out from the police."

Danny laughed unpleasantly.

"You leeches won't get a penny! Not a penny! No one but me knows where that money is, and I'm not telling!"

"Then I calculate Hod and Coon cain't guide ye through the swamp tonight," Ezekiel said coolly. "We got word today the police got a hint ye'r here. We'll help 'em, by turning you in. Hod, git to the phone and call Sheriff Burtwell. Tell 'im we cotched this feller hidin' in the swamp."

"You betcha!" Hod said with alacrity.

"Wait!" Danny stopped him before he could reach the door. "How much of a cut do you dirty black-mailers want?"

"We don't like them words, Danny," Ezekiel said.

"All we ask is a fair amount fer the risk we been takin' keepin' ye here."

"How much?"

"A third cut."

"I'll give you \$10,000."

"'Tain't enough."

"You'll not get another cent. Take it or leave it. Turn me in if you want to! You'll involve yourself because I'll swear you hid me here."

"We hain't aimin' to be hard on ye, Danny," Ezekiel said hastily. "If we was to agree to the \$10,000, kin ye deliver tonight?"

"In fifteen minutes!"

"Ye hain't got the money on ye or hid in the woodshed!"

"No."

"But it's somewheres close. I knowed that."

"If I give you \$10,000, you'll guide me through the swamp and help me get away?"

"We will," Ezekiel promised.

"Then get a spade," Danny directed. "The money's buried under a fence post by the creek. I hid it there a year ago before they sent me up. Marked the post with a V-shaped slash of my jackknife."

"Git a spade, Hod," Ezekiel ordered.

Penny waited for no more. Stealing away, she ran to the boat where Mrs. Jones awaited her.

"No questions now!" she said tersely. "Just go as fast as you can and telephone the police! Also call my father, Anthony Parker at the *Riverview Star*! Ask him to come here right away and bring help!"

"You've found Danny Deevers!" the widow guessed, preparing to cast off.

"Yes, and maybe the stolen money! But there's not a second to lose! Let me have your knife, and go as fast as you can!"

Without questioning the odd request, Mrs. Jones gave her the knife and seized a paddle. Penny shoved the skiff far out into the stream.

Then she turned and with a quick glance toward the woodshed, darted to the nearby fence. Rapidly she examined the wooden posts, searching for a V-shaped mark. She could find no slashes of any kind. At any moment she knew the men might emerge from the woodshed and see her.

"Somehow I've got to keep them here until Mrs. Jones brings the police!" she thought. "But how?"

Suddenly an idea came to her. It might not work, but there was an outside chance it would. With desperate haste, she slashed several posts with V-shaped marks.

"That may confuse them for a few minutes," she reasoned. "But not for long."

The door of the woodshed now had opened. Penny dropped flat in the tall weeds near the fence.

Without seeing her, the four men came with a spade and began to inspect posts scarcely a dozen yards from where the girl lay.

"Here's a marked one!" called Hod as he found one of the posts Penny had slashed.

In the darkness the men did not notice that the cut was a fresh one. They began to dig. Silently the work went on until a large hole had been excavated.

"Where's the money?" Ezekiel demanded. "Danny, if ye'r pullin' a fast one—"

"I tell you I buried it under a post!" the other insisted. "Thought it was farther down the fence, but this one was marked."

Ezekiel flashed his lantern full on the post which now had been tilted far over on its side.

"The post's marked," he confirmed. "Fresh new slashes."

"Let's see!" Danny exclaimed. He examined the marking briefly and straightened up. "I never made those cuts! Someone's tricked me!"

Excited by the discovery, the men now moved from post to post. Other slashes were found.

"Here's the one with my mark!" Danny cried, pointing to a post close to where Penny lay hidden. "Who slashed these others? Someone must have learned where I buried the money!"

"It does look kinda bad," said Ezekiel. "But there hain't been no diggin' by this post. Git busy, boys!"

Taking turns, Coon and Hod fell to with the spade. Soon they had uncovered three large tin cans filled with bank notes.

"It's all here!" Danny said jubilantly. "Every dollar!"

Ezekiel blew out the lantern light, looking carefully about the yard. "There hain't no time to divide the

money now," he said. "We gotta git you through the swamp, Danny, before them snoopin' police come around. Bring the cans and come on! We're moving out o' here right now!"

Hod shuffled off to get the boat ready as the others each picked up a can and followed quickly.

## CHAPTER

## 24

*UNDER THE FENCE POST*

PENNY WAS tormented with worry as she saw the men walk hurriedly to the creek where they launched a flat-bottomed boat belonging to Ezekiel. Soon the craft was lost in the blackness of the swamp channel.

"There goes my chance to catch Danny and recover the stolen money!" she thought. "Oh, what can I do to prevent them from getting away?"

Another boat had been tied up at the dock, but Penny knew she never would dare enter the swamp alone at night. In any case, what chance would she have against four armed men?

"If only Mrs. Jones hadn't hurt her ankle!" she thought. "It will take her a long while to reach a telephone, and help may not get here for an hour!"

As Penny stood gazing gloomily toward the swamp, a shaft of light cut fleetingly across the water. The flash came from the headbeam of a car swinging up the lane to the Hawkins' house.

Not knowing who the arrivals might be, the girl stepped behind a tree to wait. Soon the car came closer, halting with a jerk.

From the sedan stepped Mr. Parker, Salt, and Jerry Livingston. Scarcely believing her eyes, Penny ran to meet them.

"Oh, Dad!" she cried. "You did get Mrs. Jones' message!"

"Message?" he inquired. "Why, no! We were worried because you had been gone so long, so we came out here to find you. What's this all about?"

Penny rapidly told of Danny's flight into the swamp with the stolen money.

"If Mrs. Jones reaches a phone, police should get here any minute!" she added.

"In the meantime, we can't let those men escape!" Mr. Parker exclaimed. "Salt, you stay here and wait for the police. If they don't come in ten minutes, go after them!"

"Sure, Chief!"

"Jerry, you come with me," the publisher directed, untying the boat at the dock. "We'll try to keep those men in sight and mark the way for police to follow."

As Penny followed Jerry into the boat, her father protested quickly:

"Penny, you know you can't go! Danny Deevers is a desperate character."

"If you expect to capture him, you'll have to take

me, Dad. They'll probably follow the main channel to Black Island and beyond. You'll be lost before you've covered half the distance."

"All right, come along," Mr. Parker agreed unwillingly.

The boat shoved off into the cool night.

Fairly certain the Hawkins' boat would pass Look-out Point, Penny directed her father and Jerry to row toward it. Soon she caught a glimpse of a moving light through the trees.

"That's their boat!" she exclaimed. "Ezekiel must have lighted his lantern again!"

Scarcely had she spoken than those in the Parker craft were startled to hear a metallic pounding sound from the direction of the Hawkins' farmhouse.

"The dishpan signal!" Penny cried in dismay. "We forgot about Mrs. Hawkins! Evidently she saw us leave the dock and is warning her menfolks! Now they'll know someone is following them!"

Mr. Parker's face became very grave as the girl revealed the significance of the signal. Penny also told him what she and Mrs. Jones had learned on Black Island.

"Unarmed, we've no chance to capture those men," he commented. "Our best bet is to keep them in sight, marking the trail well for police to follow."

"And hope they do," Jerry added grimly.

Breaking overhanging tree limbs, and slashing trunks

to blaze the trail, the party passed Lookout Point.

When they were perhaps twenty yards beyond the isle, a bullet suddenly whizzed through the trees, only a few feet above their heads. The shot had been fired from the island.

"Duck low!" Mr. Parker ordered. "They've taken refuge there!"

As the trio remained motionless, another bullet whined over their heads.

"Dad, it's only a trick to divert us!" Penny whispered. "One of the Hawkins' boys probably has stayed on the island, but the others have gone on! See through the trees!"

Jerry and Mr. Parker peered where she pointed and caught the brief flash of lantern light.

"You're right!" the publisher agreed. "Row on, Jerry! We're practically out of range of Lookout Point now."

The boat pushed on. A light mist was rising from the water and the night was very dark. Shielded by the blackness, the trio slipped away without becoming the target for another bullet.

"We've got to keep that other boat in sight!" Mr. Parker said grimly. "If we lose it, we may never find our way out of this place!"

"And if we catch up, we may never be allowed to get out!" Jerry observed.

Penny, who scarcely had taken her eyes from the moving point of light ahead, now exclaimed:

"They've blown out the lantern!"

"Then they may have seen us," Mr. Parker muttered. "If only we were armed!"

Cautiously, the party proceeded. A few minutes later as the boat passed a high point of land several hundred yards deeper in the swamp, another bullet whizzed dangerously close overhead.

"Where'd that come from?" Mr. Parker demanded, shielding Penny with his body.

Jerry pointed to the high point of land on the right hand side of the channel. "Those birds must have pulled up there and hope to pick us off!" he whispered.

Still another bullet whined close over their heads, splashing as it struck the water.

Hurriedly Jerry steered the boat into a clump of bushes. All remained motionless and silent.

Bullets kept splattering the water, though farther away.

"We're in a pocket!" Mr. Parker fumed. "They can pick us off almost at will if we stay here!"

"What's our move, Chief?" Jerry asked anxiously.

"Let's back-track to the farm and await police. It's the only thing we can do."

As a lull came in the firing, Jerry shoved off and rowed rapidly back toward Lookout Point. All

crouched low in the boat, but no shots were fired at them.

"They're satisfied we've turned back," Mr. Parker said. "That was what they wanted."

However, as Lookout Point loomed up, the party was disconcerted to see a tall, lean figure silhouetted there.

"Stay where ye be, or I'll fire!" the man shouted. "If ye try to pass, I'll sink ye'r boat!"

"It's Ezekiel!" Penny whispered.

Mr. Parker signaled Jerry to row back out of range. "We've trapped ourselves between two fires!" he muttered in disgust. "Ezekiel stayed here on purpose to guard the channel while the others make their getaway."

"Danny could be captured easily if only we could get word to Salt and the police," Jerry added.

Penny and her father nodded gloomily. Salt, they knew, would follow their trail into the swamp as soon as police reached the Hawkins' farm. But Ezekiel from his point of vantage, would fire upon them before they realized they were running into danger.

"We could chance it and try to push through," Jerry proposed.

"Ezekiel's not bluffing," Mr. Parker replied. "Those first shots were a warning. If we attempt to pass now, he may shoot to kill."

"There's one way we might bring help," Jerry said,

staring thoughtfully at the grim figure guarding the channel.

"How?" Penny demanded eagerly.

"You and your father would have to wait on the bank and let me take the boat."

"Too risky," Mr. Parker said. "You never could get through."

"I'd try an old trick," the reporter explained. "When Ezekiel starts shooting, I'll upset the boat and float beneath it until I'm past the point. I'm a good swimmer and can hold my breath a long while. Anyway, after the boat is upset, there will be a pocket of air beneath it."

"It might not work."

"Let me try it. Unless we get word through, Danny Deevers is certain to escape."

After lengthy whispered debate, Mr. Parker reluctantly agreed to the plan. Retreating beyond Ezekiel's range of vision, the boat brought up on shore where Penny and her father alighted.

"Wait right here!" Jerry directed. "I'll be back for you in a few minutes!"

Boldly the reporter pushed off alone in the boat, drifting down channel. Before he had gone many yards, Ezekiel challenged him.

"Ye come another foot, and I'm lettin' ye have it!"

Jerry shouted an insult. But as Ezekiel's gun spat, he upset the boat, disappearing beneath it.



"Oh, Dad!" Penny murmured anxiously, watching the craft float slowly downstream past the point.

"Was Jerry really hit?"

"I don't think so."

"What if Ezekiel fires again?"

"He can't harm Jerry now unless he's forced to come up for air."

Anxiously the trio watched the overturned boat. Unless Jerry had found the pocket of air, they knew not even an expert swimmer could remain so long underwater.

Finally the boat was beyond their range of vision, blotted out by darkness.

"Jerry has nerve!" Mr. Parker commented. "He's safely through now."

Nervously the publisher and Penny kept attentive watch of Lookout Point, fearful lest Ezekiel launch a boat and try to capture them. To their intense relief, the swamper made no such move. Occasionally, they caught brief glimpses of him as he shifted his position.

Directing all their attention upon Ezekiel, Penny and her father paid less heed to the channel. Near them was a passage so narrow a boatman could have reached out to touch bushes on either side.

A slight rustling sound close by suddenly startled Penny.

"What was that, Dad?" she whispered.

"Only the wind," he reassured her. "Ezekiel's still over there on the point. We're safe enough."

Even as he made the observation, a boat moved out from behind the screen of leaves. Penny and her father found themselves gazing directly into the barrel of a gun.

"Safe, are ye?" Coon Hawkins shouted in glee. "We got ye now, ye sneakin' snoopers! Ye won't do no more spyin' in this swamp!"

With him in the boat were his brother and Danny Deevers.

"Git in!" Coon ordered sharply.

"What will you do with us?" Mr. Parker asked, trying to stall for time.

"We're takin' ye to Black Island," Coon replied, prodding the publisher with his gun. "Move!"

One glance at the grim, determined faces of the men convinced Mr. Parker and Penny it would be folly to resist. Silently they entered the boat.

Hod pushed off and the craft moved noiselessly away into the night.

## OUTWITTED

FOR AN endless time, it seemed, the party moved deeper and deeper into the swamp. As the night became cool, Penny shivered and leaned close to her father.

Worn out, she slumped against his shoulder and finally dropped into a light sleep. When she opened her eyes, a pale moon had risen over the treetops, lighting the way.

At last, the boat brought up in a cove at Black Island.

"We're leavin' ye here," Coon informed the prisoners. "Maybe ye'll be found tomorrer or next week after we're safe away. If not, well hit's jest too bad!"

Penny and her father were hustled ashore. Despite vigorous struggles, Mr. Parker then was bound by Coon and Hod and lashed with his back to a tree. Before Penny could be treated likewise, a dog began to bark.

"It's Bones!" she cried. "You have him here on the island!"

"Sure, we got him," agreed Hod indifferently.

Penny loudly called the dog's name and he bounded through the brush toward her. His long hair was matted with burs, but he seemed in good health and well fed.

Before Penny could get her hands on him, Coon seized and tossed the dog into the boat.

"Please let me keep Bones!" she pleaded.

"Yeah, leave the dog on the island," growled Danny Deevers. "He'll be a bother to us."

"Git the dog then, gal," commanded Coon.

Penny scrambled aboard the Hawkins' boat. Bones had crawled far forward.

As she bent to gather him into her arms, her hand encountered a gunny sack. Inside were wrapped three hard, round objects.

"The cans of stolen money!" Penny thought, her pulse jumping.

Without considering the punishment that might be meted out to her, she seized the sack.

"Hey!" shouted Coon furiously. "Drop those cans!"

He sprang aboard, intending to strike her a stunning blow. Penny leaped for shore, but the boat shot from beneath her feet.

Misbalanced, it went over, tumbling Coon and herself into the water.

But as Penny went down, she clung fast to the cans of money. Fortunately, the muddy water was shallow. Her feet touched bottom and she came up sputtering.

Hod and Danny started for the boat on a run, intending to seize her. Suddenly, they halted, listening intently.

"What was that?" Danny demanded. "Thought I heard the splash of a paddle!"

"Two boats are coming!" Hod cried hoarsely. "Police!"

"Come on!" ordered Danny, seizing one end of the overturned boat. "Help me right this! We'll still get away! The girl goes with us as a hostage!"

Hod grasped Penny's arm, while his brother aided Danny with the boat.

"No go!" ordered a cool voice from the thicket. "I gotta you covered!"

As the three men whirled around, Tony, rifle in hand, came out of the deep shadows.

"Stand-a by tree!" he commanded, motioning with the gun. "Keep-a hands up!"

Sullenly the three men obeyed. Tony guarded them closely until policemen swarmed over the island.

In the first boat were Salt, Jerry and several officers.

Behind came a second boat, also loaded with policemen.

Danny, Hod and Coon quickly were handcuffed and placed under heavy guard. Tony then helped Penny release her father.

"What about Ezekiel?" the publisher asked. "We ought to get him too!"

Jerry revealed that the swamper already had been taken prisoner at Lookout Island. Two policemen had remained behind to guard both him and his wife.

"Oh, Jerry! I'm so glad you got through safely!" Penny declared. "Did you have any trouble?"

"Not a bit," he replied. "When I reached the farmhouse, police already were there. Mrs. Jones had telephoned them."

"We arrested Mrs. Hawkins," Salt took up the story. "Then we captured Ezekiel at Lookout Point, and followed your boat here. Most of the time we had you in sight, though from a long distance."

Penny was greatly relieved to be able to turn over the three cans of stolen money to police officers. By lantern light a hasty count was made and it was disclosed that a sizeable portion of the funds were missing.

However, when Danny Deevers, Hod, and Coon were searched, a large roll of bills was found in the escaped convict's pocket.

"This should account for it all," said the police officer, taking charge of the money and adding it to the other. "So you were trying to double-cross your pals, Danny? Figured on keeping the lion's share!"

Danny glared at the officer, refusing to answer.

"So you got nothing to say, eh?" the officer prodded. "Maybe you'll be in a more talkative mood when we get you back to the pen. You'll do double time for skipping out!"

Danny's sullen gaze fastened briefly on Jerry Livingston.

"I got only one regret!" he muttered. "I wish I'd slugged that guy harder when I had the chance!"

"May I ask the prisoners a question or two?" Penny asked the officer in charge.

"Sure, go ahead," he nodded. "If you get anything out of 'em, you're good."

Penny knew that Danny, a hardened criminal, would never give her any information, so she centered her attention upon Hod and Coon.

At first, they only eyed her sullenly, refusing to speak. But after she had pointed out that a more cooperative attitude might bring a lighter sentence, they showed a little interest.

"How did you come to be mixed up with Danny?" she asked. "Were you all together in the big bank robbery?"

The question drew fire from Hod.

"No, we weren't!" he shouted. "We never even knowed where Danny hid the money until tonight!"

"Then why were you so willing to hide and help him?"

"'Cause him and Paw always was good friends! Danny come here, saying the cops was after him and would we give him some clothes and hide him fer a day or two? So like fools we was, we took him in and kept him in the woodshed. It would have been safe enough if you hadn't come snoopin' around!"

"No doubt you all would have gone free if you hadn't made the mistake of keeping Louise's dog," Penny retorted. "However, you seem to forget you were operating a still illegally."

"Anyone else in on that business?" the policeman cut in. "How'd they market the stuff?"

"Through a trucker at Hartwell City," Penny exclaimed. "I think they called him Ike."

"Too bad the bird will go free, while these eggs do a stretch in the pen," commented the policeman. "You can depend on it though, they'll never do the smart thing and turn him in."

"Oh, wouldn't we?" growled Hod. "He was no pal o' ours!"

"Would it git us a lighter stretch if we was to turn him in?" asked Coon craftily.

"It might."

"His name's Ike Glanzy and he stays mostly at the

Devon Club in Hartwell City," Hod volunteered.

"We'll pick him up," said the policeman. "Depend on it, he'll be behind bars before another twenty-four hours. Now let's get out of here!"

As the boats began to load for the return trip through the swamp, Penny glanced anxiously about the tiny clearing.

"Where's Tony?" she asked.

No one had seen the Italian lad in the last few minutes. Unnoticed, he had slipped away into the interior of the island.

"We can't leave without Tony!" Penny protested. "He's afraid he'll be sent back to Italy, so he's run off somewhere!"

"He can't have gone far," said Salt. "We should be able to find him."

However, an intensive search of the bushes nearby did not reveal the missing youth. At last, in desperation, Penny called his name several times.

"Please, Tony, give yourself up!" she pleaded. "You won't be sent back to Italy! I'm sure of it! Please come out of hiding!"

"If that appeal doesn't fetch him, nothing will," said Salt. "We've held up the party too long now, Penny. We've got to shove off."

Penny nodded disconsolately. When the photographer took her arm and started back toward the waiting boats, she did not resist.

But after they had gone a few yards, she abruptly halted.

"Tony is close by!" she insisted. "I can feel that he's watching us now! Listen! Don't you hear the bushes rustling?"

"I do hear something. Maybe it's only an animal."

"Tony," Penny made one last appeal, "if you're back there in the dark, please come out. Don't you understand? You were a hero tonight—you saved the day by popping out of the bushes at just the right moment. Please don't fail me now."

The leaves were stirring again. Then, to Penny's joy, the branches parted. Grinning sheepishly, Tony shuffled out.

"You call-a me?" he grinned.

"Oh, Tony!" Penny seized his arm and held fast. "We've practically torn out the lining of our lungs, trying to find you! Come on! You're going back with us!"

"Not to Immigration mens!"

"Oh, don't worry about that now, Tony! My father has a little influence and he'll help you all he can. Besides, you're almost certain to win a portion of the reward offered for Danny Deevers' capture."

"Money no good if they send-a me back to Italy!" Tony said stubbornly. "Want-a stay in America. I work-a hard. Go to school!"

"I think perhaps it can be arranged," Penny prom-

ised recklessly. With Salt's help, she kept steering the boy toward the boat. "After all you've done tonight, Immigration authorities couldn't be hard-hearted enough to refuse you citizenship."

Tony allowed himself to be persuaded and entered a boat with Penny and other members of the party. After a long and tiring but uneventful trip through the swamp, the Hawkins' farm finally was reached.

At the farmhouse, Mrs. Hawkins and her husband were being held prisoners by other policemen. Also waiting were the Widow Jones and Trapper Joe Scoville, whom she had summoned.

"Praises be! The police got to ye in time!" the widow exclaimed, giving Penny's hand an affectionate squeeze. "If harm had befallen ye this night, I never would have fergiven myself fer having taken ye into the swamp."

"Maybe what happened'll teach ye a lesson, but I got m' doubts," interposed the old trapper with a chuckle. "Winmin is mighty stubborn critters!"

As Mrs. Hawkins and her husband were led out of the house, the woman caught sight of her two sons handcuffed to officers. "Hod! Coon!" she screamed hysterically.

She tried to break away from the policemen who held her, and would have attacked Danny Deevers had they not restrained her.

"Ye'r the one who got us into this mess!" she ac-

cused the convict. "I hope they lock ye up fer the rest o' y'er life!"

Much later, after all the prisoners had been confined in Riverview jail, Mr. Parker and Penny obtained custody of Tony. Arrangements were made so that the lad might remain in the Parker home while Immigration officials considered his case.

The Italian boy proved to be a perfect guest. Not only did he help about the house and yard, but he never overlooked an opportunity to improve his education. Many a time Penny or her father came upon him in the library, reading a book.

"If he doesn't get to stay, it will be a crime!" the girl declared. "Oh, why doesn't the Immigration department reach a decision?"

Despite Penny's fretting, weeks dragged on and still Tony's case hung fire. Many telegrams went back and forth between Riverview and Washington, D. C. So involved did the affair become that even Mr. Parker began to lose hope the boy could be kept in America.

But at last word came that the last bit of red tape had been cut. A high immigration official had ruled that although it was irregular, Tony might remain in Riverview, providing someone would guarantee his support.

Mr. Parker willingly signed the necessary papers. A job next was in order, but this Penny easily arranged through Mark Fiello, the hamburger shop man.

As for Danny Deevers, the convict promptly was returned to prison, and the stolen \$50,000 turned over to the Third Federal Bank.

In due time, Ezekiel, Coon, Hod and Mrs. Hawkins were convicted on charges of harboring a fugitive from justice. At their trial, evidence also was introduced, showing they had operated a still illegally.

For many days the *Riverview Star* carried front page stories of the happenings. Penny wrote several of the articles, while others carried Jerry's byline.

"The best part of all is that with Danny behind bars, you'll no longer be in danger," the girl remarked one day to the reporter. "He really was out to get you."

"I suppose so," Jerry agreed, "but I never was much worried. Danny's real motive in coming back to Riverview was to recover the hidden \$50,000. Running into me—and particularly you—proved his undoing."

In days that followed, Penny drove many times to the swamp to see Mrs. Jones and Trapper Joe. Both rejoiced that Danny Deevers and the Hawkins' family could cause no more trouble.

One afternoon as the girl paid the widow a long call, they fell to talking over their swamp experiences.

"It was mighty excitin' out there—you and me in the boat," Mrs. Jones recalled. "Now that it's all over, I hain't ashamed to say I was plenty skeered we'd never git out o' the swamp alive."

"So was I," grinned Penny.

"Revenooers was in yesterday to smash up Ezekiel's still."

"They were!"

"Yep, and they got track o' that trucker who was in so thick with the Hawkins boys." The widow sighed and pulled aside a kitchen curtain to gaze thoughtfully toward the swamp. "Well, I reckon the last bit o' evil's been driv' away from Black Island. From now on, the land'll jest lie there and belong to the wind and the rain."

"And to us," Penny added softly.

The widow nodded as her gaze lingered long on the fringe of towering pines. "One o' these days, when the spirit moves us, we'll go back there," she promised. "The swamp always belongs to them that loves it!"